





A WALK ALONG THE SHORE

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The story of Peggy Puckett as told to Jenny, August 1997,
Spartanburg, South Carolina.

JENNY PEARCE

Historic photographs taken by Peggy's friends and relations.
Other photographs and pencil sketches by Jenny Pearce.
Designed by Jenny Pearce. Computer layout by Guy Burns.

Printed by a Xerox iGen 3 on 115 GSM Saxton Chardonnay.
Images scanned with a HP 5100s scanner then modified in
Photoshop 3.0. Page layout originally created using Page-
Maker 6.0, reformatted July 2009 with InDesign CS4.

Published by GeeBee Publishing,
99 Leith Rd, Leith, Tasmania, 7315.

First edition 1989.

Second edition 2003.

Third edition August 2009.

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Frontispiece: Cuvier Beach on Hunter Island

This book is dedicated to

Norah Dawn Burness

(my mother)

who died April 2007,

and to Peggy

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	ix
Preface	xi
Author's Note	1
1. Early Years	2
2. Three Hummock Island.....	8
3. Personalities	18
4. Muttonbirding	26
5. Two Islands	28
6. Sydney.....	34
7. War.....	36
8. Building of the <i>Jean Nichols</i>	38
9. Melbourne.....	42
10. America.....	52

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to Peggy for all the hours of storytelling and the use of her historic photos. I would like to thank Guy Burns for his skills with the computer, scanner, printer and layout of the book. And also for his time and inspiration.

PREFACE

Peg's childhood on Three Hummock Island, so beautifully and simply remembered after a lifetime living across the other side of the world, demonstrates how indelibly those experiences are etched in her soul.

The uniqueness of the islands' isolation, fascination and contrast is but a part of it. You see, our islands – Peg's Islands – cover 13,000 square kilometres of sea, channels, reefs and rocky outcrops where weather patterns hatch, decay and pass, where moods and colours reflect not just on the landscape but on the very being of those who understand it.

All my life I have enjoyed a close association with this area, but for the last ten years I have flown hundreds of tourists, sightseers, photographers and adventurers to the islands. Without exception they see the beauty and colour but few feel its moods and mystique because all too often their life is already sophisticated and preconditioned to material things and their stay is fleeting and transitory. Peg's wasn't.

Jenny Pearce has captured Peg's love of the islands, the people who were part of them and the innocent and often childlike observations with charm and simplicity.

Peg's story isn't just about a little girl growing up. It is about part of our history and we are lucky to have it so poignantly preserved.

Heather Innes







Peggy, 1943

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Since I was a child I have heard stories about a mysterious relation of mine called Peggy Puckett. She is my mother's cousin who left Australia to live in America after marrying a marine from South Carolina during the Second World War. I always thought this a very bold and even outrageous thing to do. The members of Mum's family were all so conventional, leading quiet lives with their families and very rarely travelling outside Tasmania. I was in awe of Peggy and fascinated by her.

My chance to meet her came in 1972 when I was a young housewife and mother. She had returned to Tasmania for a visit after twenty-six years of living in America. She sat across the room from me in my parents' home in Launceston – an attractive petite lady, looking much younger than her forty-seven years. Her blonde hair was immaculately groomed and she wore neat, figure-hugging clothes. Her manner was affectionate, outgoing and bubbly. With her slight Southern American accent she told me about the previous time she had seen me, before she left Australia, when I was a tiny baby.

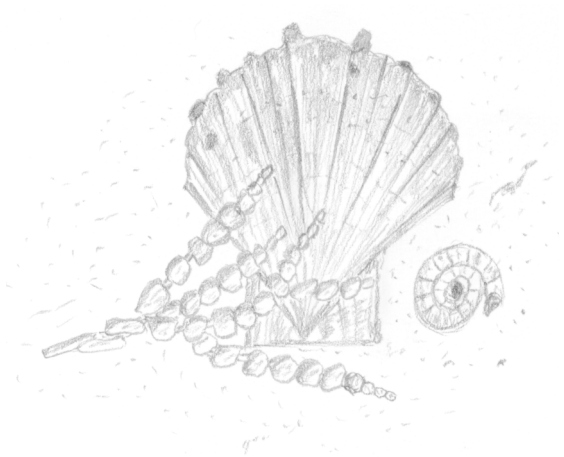
In 1996 when a friend and I were planning a cycling trip to America it occurred to me – 'Wouldn't it be great if we could visit Peggy!' And so we did.

In October of that year, she and her son Barry met us at Greenville Airport in South Carolina. She was seventy-three years old, a widow, and still living in Spartanburg. Although so much older she was still the attractive blonde lady that I remembered. Her story began to unfold.

We came to know Peggy very well and found her more than willing to talk for hours about her interesting life. On our return to America in 1997 I encouraged her to talk even more, while I scribbled notes of interest, mainly about her early life. In particular, I was fascinated by the time she spent on Three Hummock Island and then later her journey to America as a war bride. In fact all of Peggy's life is fascinating. This is her story.

Jenny Pearce
Leith, Tasmania

1. EARLY YEARS



I was born on the 26th November, 1922 at Stanley, Tasmania. My parents were James and Emily Smedley. Mum was forty-three when I was born. I was the baby of the family. Enid was the oldest, then Rex, Jess, Colin and me. My brothers and sisters have all gone now so I'm the only one left. It's kind of lonely when you are the only one left. I went to school to Grade 7 at Stanley State School. We were very poor when I was a girl. Dad worked as a labourer around the wharfs and boats. I had a wonderful childhood though. I loved the beaches, especially Godfreys Beach and I was always swimming. We used to climb the Nut and the wind would howl around us. I was not allowed to go to the wharf because it was dangerous around the boats, and I was definitely not allowed to swim there. But I *did* swim there. I used to sneak over,



I was four years old when this photo was taken

run to the edge of the wharf and dive straight over the edge into the water. It was so exciting and I'd do it over and over. Dear old Mum never knew. I'd go home and tell her I'd been at Godfreys Beach all day. I was a bit of a dare-devil and quite naughty.



My hometown, Stanley, nestled beneath the Nut

I spent a lot of time with my cousins at Forest – Merle and Norah Smedley mostly. They were cousins on both sides as Mum and Aunt Lizzie were sisters and Dad and Uncle Edgar were brothers. I loved Aunt Lizzie and Uncle Edgar and being on their farm. They had a good orchard. Those apples and cherries were so delicious. When I slept there I would share a double bed with Merle and Norah – the three of us all cuddled up together. It was quite common for three or four children to sleep in a bed together in those days. We would play house in the orchard for hours. We had nothing to play with except dirt and rocks and sticks, but that's what we used to make our 'house'. Norah and I used to always eat a little sap from one of the trees. It was chewy and so good. Yes, I had a really wonderful childhood.



*My parents Emily
and James Smedley*



A Walk Along The Shore

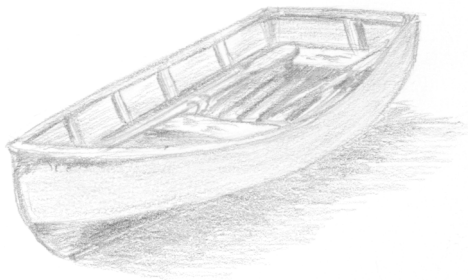


Clockwise from top left:

- *my cousin Molly, Dad, my sister Jess, my cousin Ella and me in front;*
- *my brother Colin;*
- *my brother Rex;*
- *Jess (right) and I posing on the fence;*
- *enjoying Godfreys Beach at Stanley*



2. THREE HUMMOCK ISLAND



I started working for Mrs Nichols on Three Hummock Island in 1937 when I was fourteen and I worked there for six years. Three Hummock Island is approximately thirty miles north-west of Stanley on the north-west coast of Tasmania. It is a small square-ish shaped island about six miles by six miles. It was leased from the Tasmanian Government by Mr and Mrs Bill Nichols for grazing cattle. They lived in the main house in the south-west corner of the island and built up a small community of workers. The wharf was on the western side in a sheltered bay called Chimney Corner not far from the homestead. In the area around the homestead there were sheds, animal pens, horse stables and gardens.

Cattle roamed the cleared paddocks and some of the rough country. There were no fences except around the mustering yards. The cattle were confined only by the denser areas of scrub and the shoreline. The 'three hummocks' were not high but formed good land marks for anyone travelling around the island. There were horse trails all over.

From the shore we could see the other islands in the group – Hunter

to the west, and Walker and Robbins to the south. On a clear day we could see Tasmania.



*Looking towards Green Point
on Three Hummock*

Some of the island was pure wilderness covered in natural scrub, with native animals and birds everywhere. The prevailing westerly winds nearly always blew strongly so it was a wild

and windswept place. The winds, combining with the rugged, rocky coast had caused several shipwrecks. We had no communication with the outside world – no radios or phone. If there was an emergency, or if we wanted to attract attention, we'd light big fires on Signal Hill. Some fisherman would see them and call in to see what was the matter.



I cannot imagine anything more beautiful and wild than a walk along the shore of Three Hummock Island all those years ago. I loved that island.



The Five Sisters and beach on Three Hummock

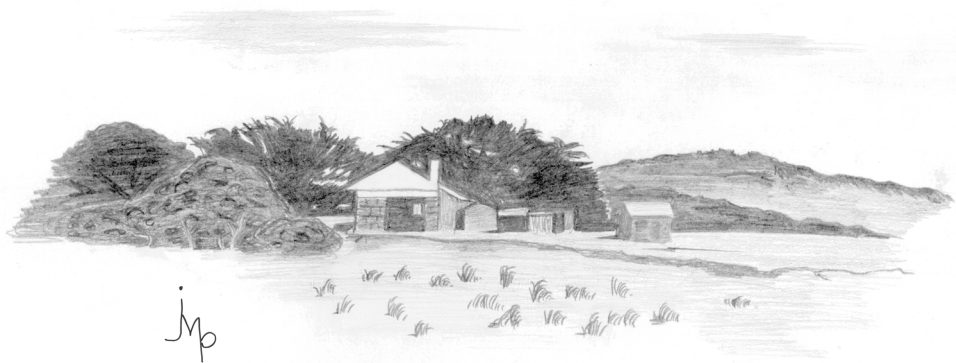


Fifteen years old and at leisure on Three Hummock

I worked mostly outdoors with Mrs Nichols. Horses were very important on the island as we had no other form of transport. I rode almost every day. We checked the cattle and rounded them up on horseback. Mrs Nichols and I did this work together. She called me her right-hand girl. I was her companion.

My horse was Ginger. She was my favourite. I also rode Breezer and Dinah. They were both frisky, while Ginger was quiet. She was much easier to manage than those sassy ones.

Mrs Nichols was the brains and business woman of the couple. Mr Nichols just did as he was told. Most of the time I was content to work with her but sometimes I would get sick of it, so I'd just go home to Mum, then go back to the island when I was ready. They took me back straight away. Mrs Nichols must have really cared for me because she looked after me so well. Most of the people on the island and around Stanley, called her 'Ciss' or 'Ma', but I always called her Mrs Nichols.



The Homestead



I was always happy on horseback – riding Dinah and being led by Mrs Nichols

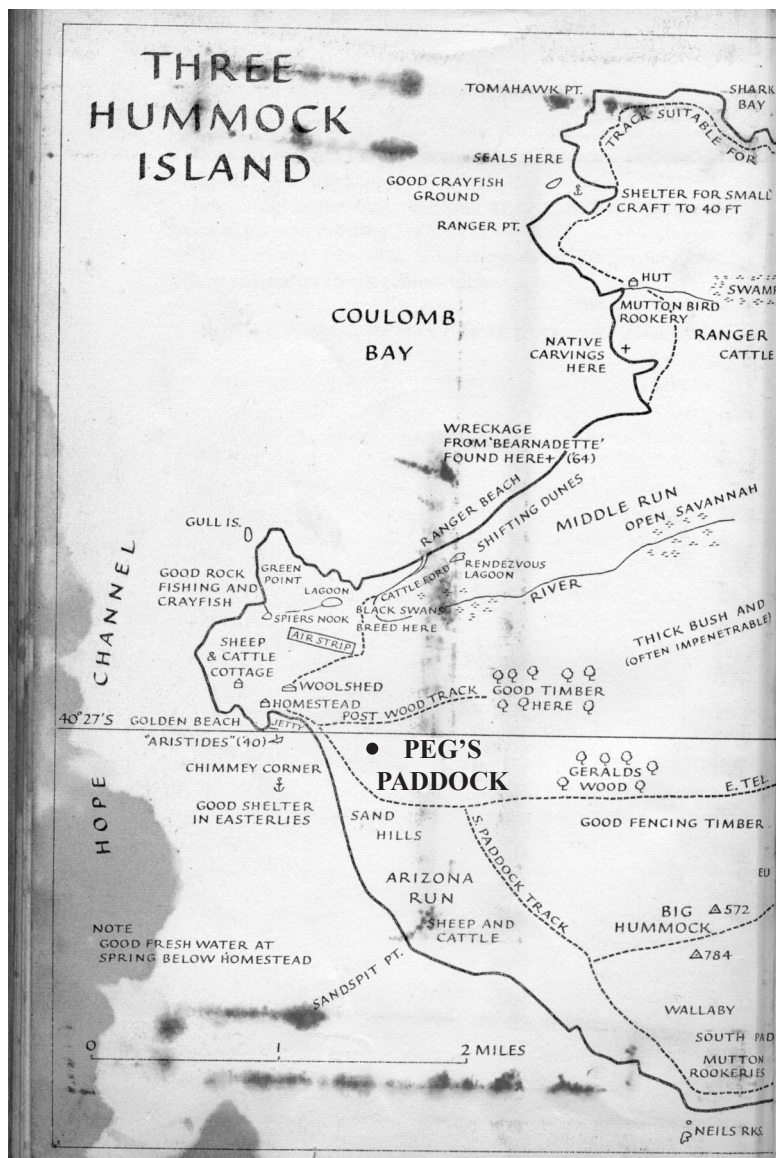


Rita (left) and I among sacks of vegetables at sea on the Lady Flinders

I never got a salary, but was paid by being given food and lodging, clothes, and sometimes a bit of pocket money. Once she bought me some beautiful silk stockings. I'll never forget them. We had a big garden near the water-hole. We grew turnips, onions, potatoes, cabbages, carrots and parsnips. We made a lot of stews and we sure did eat a lot of turnips. It was part of my job to work in the garden with Mrs Nichols. We had about twenty hens and had our own eggs.



With Rita (left) on the Lady Flinders



Map taken from *Escape to an Island* by Eleanor Allston

We'd put down the eggs by setting them in a kerosene tin of fat. The fat would stop the air getting in and they would be preserved. We had a few pigs and sometimes would kill one for meat. One pig was bitten by a snake and we had to shoot it. We also had sheep and ate a lot of lamb.

We always dressed in old clothes around the island. Mrs Nichols wore old patched things. And I don't think those clothes were washed very often either! She was a big woman and looked a bit rough. But you should have seen her when she went to Melbourne on holiday or for shopping. Out would come all her beautiful things, silk dresses, suits, big woollen coats and her diamonds. She had fabulous diamond rings. She was a very wealthy woman. If she wanted to, she could put on airs too. Whenever Mrs Nichols went to Melbourne, I'd go with her.

The Nichols owned the *Lady Flinders* which was the ship that carried cargo and passengers to King Island, Flinders Island and Melbourne from Stanley and Launceston. She also carried cattle and sheep to and from the islands. She was mostly a cargo ship, but had six or eight cabins for the crew and passengers. I travelled on her many times. Once there were too many passengers and I had to sleep in the engine room in all that heat.



I travelled to all the islands in Bass Strait with the Nichols, but for about the first six trips I was sea-sick and wanted to go home. Then I grew to love the sea and I still love it. Once, as we were coming back from King Island we sailed into a fierce storm and I was so frightened. The ship was going right up, then BANG! hitting the water. I came out of my cabin and said, ‘What’s going on?’ The men told me we were in a storm. There was water everywhere, even in the cabins. I saw the green water sloshing over the port holes. All the crewmen were working hard pumping and pumping and people were rushing around checking equipment. Waves were washing right over the ship. After that I was always scared in storms.

The Nichols sold the *Lady Flinders* to the transport company of Holymans and then in 1938, on the first run to King Island, she was wrecked on the coast of Three Hummock. Captain O’Neil was the master. He was also master of the *Aristides* when she was wrecked near the wharf on Three Hummock two years later in 1940. That’s suspicious. There was some talk of this being a put-up job to get the insurance, but I wouldn’t know about that. Well ... yes, I guess it could have been a put-up job, him wrecking two ships.



Above and left: part of the rocky coastline of Three Hummock

3. PERSONALITIES



I can remember a lot of the people who worked with me. Joyce was the cook on the *Lady Flinders* and also on the island. Mary did the housework. I was not cut out for cooking or housework. I preferred the horses and riding, checking the cattle, burning off and doing whatever Mrs Nichols asked me. Lots of men worked for her on the ship. There was an Aboriginal half-caste called Charlie. He won £10,000 in the Tatts lottery and that was a lot of money in those days. He bought a beautiful house in Launceston where I once went to visit him. Lyle Beswick



I'm the short one in the back row with (from left) Bill, Joyce, and Les, with Birdie sitting in front.

worked for her. He used to cook sometimes. There was also a fellow called Joe. Rita, who was a niece of the Nichols, worked mostly on the *Lady Flinders*, but occasionally stopped off on the island to help out.

Mrs Nichols said I should learn to milk the cows. I didn't want to milk because those cows could kick. And they'd swish those tails around. Milking wasn't for me. I was scared of the cows. She said I had to learn, because we should all be able to milk. She sent me down there and I bribed one of the boys to milk a cow for me. He did, and so I took a bucket of milk back to Mrs Nichols and told her I milked.



On the Lady Flinders – I'm on the left, then Bob, Lew and Joyce, 1938

She also wanted me to learn to shoot so she sent me to Ranger Beach with Les Nichols, her nephew, to teach me. I wasn't very happy with this. Dad sometimes used to take me hunting rabbits, so I was used to guns but didn't like them. Les had a big shotgun and I had to aim at different things floating out on the water. When it fired I toppled over because of the force of it. I had to practise a few times until I could shoot pretty well. Luckily I never had to shoot after that as I never had any need for it.



Peg's Paddock as it is today

For my sixteenth birthday, Mum gave me a mother-of-pearl watch. After all these years, I still have that watch – that dear little watch. I'm lucky to have it. When we were on the ship going to King Island once, it disappeared out of my cabin. I was so upset I went to Mrs Nichols and told her. She said to leave it to her. Then I heard her shouting at one of the passengers and she came back to me with my watch. A young lady passenger had stolen it. Mrs Nichols must have known she was that way inclined.

While I was on the island, Mrs Nichols decided to name a large paddock near the homestead, and called it *Peg's Paddock** after me. I felt very pleased and honoured. It is north of the homestead over towards Ranger Beach. I think it is still called *Peg's Paddock* today.

* *Peg's Paddock is shown on the map on p15 and is mentioned in Eleanor Alliston's book Escape to an Island, Chapter 2. According to Rob Alliston it is still known as Peg's Paddock.*

The Nichols had one daughter, Jean. She was older than I was and I never really got to know her. She was away at boarding school in Hobart when I was on the island and then she went to University in Melbourne. She married a teacher called John. I remember they thought they couldn't have any children so they adopted a boy and then they started having their own children. Jean died of cancer when she was quite young.

One day some fishermen brought me the message that Dad was sick and I should go home to Stanley. I didn't want to go and I said that he'd be all right. Two or three days later I saw our neighbour's boat coming towards the island and I had a dreadful feeling that something had happened to dear old Dad. Sure enough he told me Dad had died, so I went home with him straight away. I felt dreadful. It was a terrible time.

Once Joyce (the cook) and I really saw a sight. There was a bloke called Ferguson working on the island and he was sweet on a visiting girl called Birdie. They went into his room and Joyce and I decided to peek. We found a ladder and placed it against a little window and climbed up. I saw them lying on the bed and she was wearing hose and he was rolling them down her legs, taking them off! I moved down and off the ladder quickly saying to Joyce, 'I don't want any more of that!' Another day we were spying on them having a cuddle when she pushed him away and walked off saying, 'It's just like jelly!' How we giggled and laughed over that.

It was on the island that I learned about the facts of life, sex and all that, because of incidents like these and because of all the animals. Mum never told me anything about the facts of life. In those days everything was so hushed up.

The boys hunted wallabies on Three Hummock as they were good to eat. We also used to tan the hides. I did one of my own and made a beautiful rug which I gave to Mum and Dad on a visit home. The boys also set snares all over the island. I didn't think much of it at the time, but it really was cruel – those poor wallabies. I used to go around



With Mary the housemaid (left), and Tom, 1939

the snares to check them and take out the dead wallabies. Sometimes there would be a joey in the pouch of a female and I'd put it down my jumper to keep it warm and carry it back to the homestead. I had so many joeys at one stage that the boys built me a pen for them. A lot of them died, but some survived and grew strong, then I'd let them go in the scrub. They were the cutest animals.

I had other pets too at different times. My favourite was a lamb called Mitzi. I tied a ribbon round her neck and she followed me everywhere. She would take her bottle only from me. Others would try if I was away, but she wouldn't take it from them. Mitzi was a darling little lamb.





One of the small coves on Three Hummock Island

4. MUTTONBIRDING



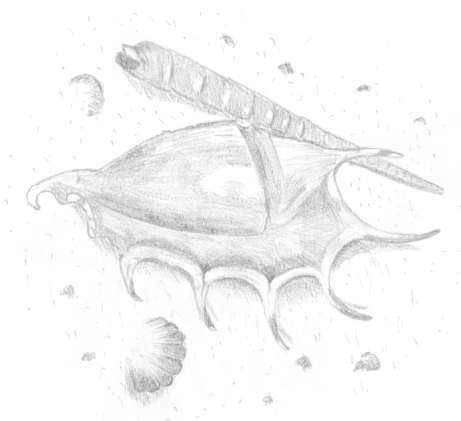
There were muttonbird (Short-tailed Shearwater) rookeries on all the islands. I never actually put my hand down a burrow to get those young fluffy birds, but all the others did. I did catch them sometimes when they came out of the burrows at night. We'd go after them with torches. I was good at cracking the birds with one hand to break their necks and then gurrying them. That was when you squeezed out, with two thumbs, the oil and stomach contents into a bucket. The oil would settle on top and Mrs Nichols used it, but I don't remember what for. We would pluck the birds then place them in a barrel of brine. Some were left as fresh birds. They were tasty, but they contained a huge amount of fat – all that fat!

When we had the *Lady Flinders*, we carried the Aboriginal half-castes to the rookeries. We sailed to Cape Barren Island, where they lived, and took them mainly to Babel Island. I can remember how a crowd of them used to sit or squat on deck. We would drop them off on Babel and wait for their catch of muttonbirds. We would then sail the loaded barrels to Launceston. Back we'd go for another load until they were all finished. The crew would load the barrels from the beach and would be standing and walking in water for hours on end because there was no jetty. It was hard and heavy work. Mrs Nichols and Joyce cooked all the time and I'd have to help them. The men were very well fed because the work was hard. Mrs Nichols saw that they were well fed. She was good like that.

She was a shrewd business woman. She would buy a whole lot of sandshoes during the birding time and sell them to the half-castes for double what she paid for them in Stanley. She also sold them clothes. I guess she made a good profit out of the half-castes.

Short-tailed Shearwater known as the muttonbird in Tasmania

5. TWO ISLANDS



Mr and Mrs Alf French and their four children lived on Hunter Island. The Government gave them a teacher, so she also lived with them – a teacher just for four children. There were three boys and a girl, Des, Doug, George and Fay. I often went over to Hunter. Sometimes a fisherman called Oscar Etchell would take me over for the ride. George, would always smile and laugh when he saw me. Then I'd be naughty. I would chase him and make him embarrassed because when I had caught him I would get him down on the floor and kiss him. He was only a little fellow.



Cuvier Beach on Hunter Island

Years later, after I'd come over here, a friend wrote to me and told me he'd gone out in his boat, fallen overboard and was drowned.* I was very sad about that.

There was no wharf on Hunter. We'd anchor out near a beach on the eastern side and row over in a dinghy then walk up to the homestead. The French family ran a few cattle on the island and later got into fishing. They also did some muttonbirding in the season. As we were sailing back to Three Hummock late in the evening, there would be nowhere on the fishing boat to get out of the wind. Oh, it was so cold.



I often went over to Hunter

* George French and his son Glen were drowned off the north-west coast in November 1972.



Leaving Stanley for Hunter Island

A few years later, Mrs French got pregnant again and when her time was near we sailed over to pick her up and take her to Stanley. I can't remember whether that baby was a boy or girl. I never saw it. Not long after that the family moved off Hunter and bought a little stone house down there near the wharf at Stanley. I can't remember anyone else living on Hunter.

We sailed regularly to Flinders Island carrying cargo, cattle and passengers. We'd go from Launceston to Flinders, to Melbourne, and back to Flinders. Holyman's weren't happy with this because we took a lot of custom away from them. They had two ships carrying cargo from Tasmania to Melbourne and back. One was the *Narracoopa* and I can't remember the name of the other one. I was always keen to go to Flinders because the beaches and mountains were so beautiful. I used to swim at the beach at Whitemark. It was a lovely place. Sometimes I would visit the old hotel there with the Nichols and sit in the Lounge. I was sweet on a boy called Teddy Garrott, who lived in Whitemark, a very scenic little town. I was also sweet on Ray Blundstone. He scared me though, because he said he wanted to run away with me and marry me. I never bothered with him after that. He was a good looking boy too. His family was cattle.



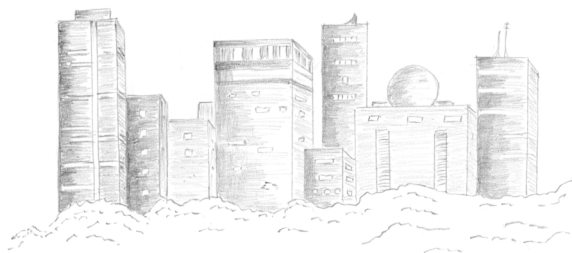
Looking across to Hunter Island from Three Hummock



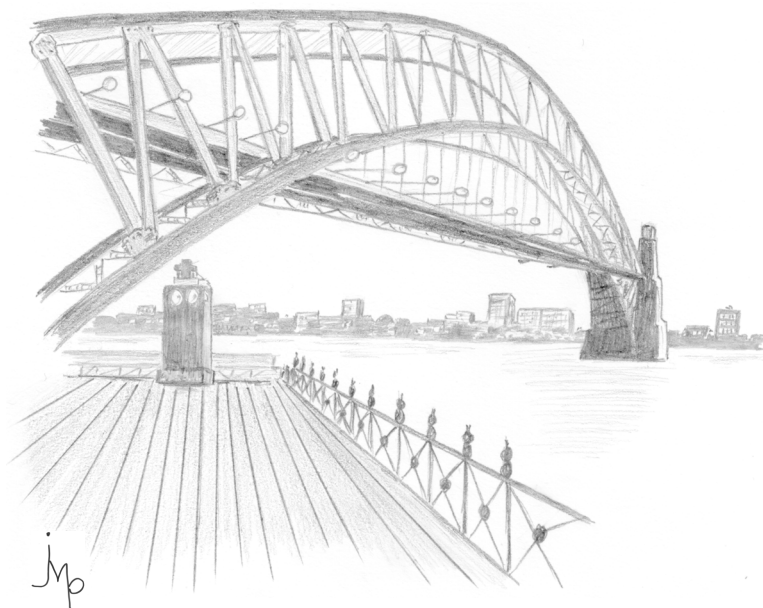
Strezlecki Peak on Flinders Island

Once we were sailing up the west coast of Flinders Island in the *Lady Flinders* when we lost a man overboard. We didn't miss him for a long time. We turned back when we realised what had happened, and do you know, in all that sea and him being just a small speck, we found him. He said he could see the lighthouse on Chappell Island and he was swimming for it.

6. SYDNEY



After the *Lady Flinders* was sold we went on a long holiday to Melbourne and Sydney. We had been to Melbourne many times but never to Sydney. We sailed up the coast from Melbourne to Sydney on the *Manoora* and rented a luxury flat in Sydney for several months – the three of us. Exploring Sydney was exciting. I went to Bondi Beach, Manly Beach, Taronga Park Zoo, the Harbour and walked around all those busy streets. Jean came to stay with us for a few weeks. Mr Nichols bought a car and we toured all around New South Wales – to the Blue Mountains, up the coast, and 'way inland. It was wonderful to see all that country. Mr Nichols was a terrible driver though and would often wobble off the road. He was more used to steering a ship! At the end of our holiday we drove to Melbourne, shipped the car to Launceston and drove on to Stanley. It was then back to Three Hummock.



Sydney Harbour Bridge

7. WAR

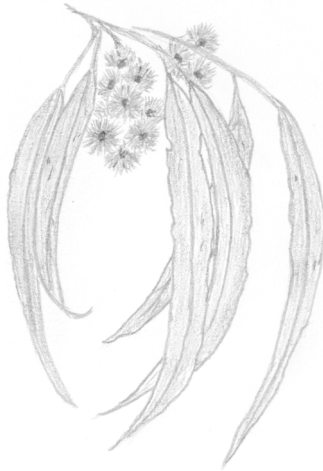


War was declared when I was on Three Hummock. We were so isolated that we didn't really know what was going on. Nothing changed. The fighting was so far away. As the war years advanced we became scared of the Japanese. When I went home to Stanley for a visit, my brother Colin, had built an air-raid shelter at the back of the house. He had dug a huge hole down under the hedge and lined it with timber. Mum had billies of food hung all around the walls.

Once I remember being terrified. Some planes flew over the island and I thought it was the Japs going to land on the beach. I was alone at the homestead for some reason. The Nichols had taken the horses down to South Paddock, so I didn't even have a horse. I ran and ran, then hid under a very prickly bush with prickles sticking into me. I thought they wouldn't bother to get me if I was in the prickles. I waited for a long time until it was very quiet – for a long, long time. I was so terrified.



8. BUILDING OF THE *JEAN NICHOLS*



Without the *Lady Flinders* the Nichols needed a new boat and so built a fifty-foot ketch which they named the *Jean Nichols* after their daughter. We went to Hobart while this was going on and stayed in a hotel in Cygnet for a whole year – the three of us. She was a much smaller boat, mainly for their own use and for fishing. She had refrigeration. The man who built the boat was called Walter Wilson. He was very well known in Tasmania as a master shipbuilder and was a dear, dear old man. He had a little place on the Huon River and that was where the *Jean* was built.

She was launched on the 19th October, 1940, and I was the person who christened her. I was only seventeen at the time. She cost £3500 and was fitted with a diesel engine which cost £1500. We were all very proud of her.

When she was finished, Mr Nichols wanted to sail her up the east coast, then across the north and north-west coasts to Three Hummock, but there was a delay because a Japanese submarine had been sighted off the east coast and he was told not to go. A bit later he was told he could sail up the coast as long as he kept close to the shoreline. They were afraid of mines.

It was a good trip back to the island and the beautiful new boat sailed perfectly. We stopped in at Launceston to get supplies. Mrs Nichols later told me that the boat was paid for the next year by the proceeds from shark fishing. Gummy sharks



*With Walter Wilson the shipbuilder, at
Cygnet in 1940*

brought in a lot of money at that time. The boat was also used to take cattle on and off the island.*

During one of the birding seasons on Three Hummock, Mrs Nichols badly scratched her hand with a muttonbird bone. It became infected almost straight away. We were very worried about it and the next morning it looked worse. Mr Nichols got the *Jean* ready and we sailed to Stanley to see the doctor. He said it was tetanus and immediately rang



The Jean sailing for Three Hummock. I am on board

* *The Jean Nichols is still in fine condition and is well-cared for by her present owner Chas Wessing of Hobart.*

the Wynyard Hospital for an ambulance. I went with Mrs Nichols in the ambulance while Mr Nichols sailed on to Wynyard in the *Jean*. She was very ill. It was touch and go. I was worried because I knew that a girl in Forest had died of tetanus after treading on a rusty nail. I sat with Mrs Nichols for hours and hours. She was in hospital for a long time while I stayed at the Wynyard Hotel. Every day I would be there at her bedside. Finally she got better and we went back to the island.



We were all very proud of the Jean

9. MELBOURNE



In 1943 when I was twenty, I decided to go to Melbourne to help with the war effort. My sister Jess was already living there, so I went to live with her. I didn't mind leaving Three Hummock because I knew I could go back any time I wanted. I always came and went as I pleased anyway. Mrs Nichols would always let me go back. I stayed with Jess for a few months and then moved into flats with friends. One was at St. Kilda and another at Prahran.

I went to the Office of Employment for the War Effort and they sent me to a factory packing Kraft cheese for the soldiers. I worked there for a few months, but I hated it. If you didn't want to work any more, you would just sit there and do nothing. The boss would tap you on the

*With friends
in Melbourne,
1943. I'm on
the right*





shoulder and say, 'Better get busy'. If you still just sat there, he'd give you the sack. So that's what I did. I got the sack.

The War Effort people then sent me to an engineering place and there was grease everywhere. It was a filthy place. When they put me to work, I just stood around and did nothing. This wasn't for me. I wanted the sack before I started, and I got it.

Then they sent me to a factory to put holes in buttons for the soldiers. That lasted a few weeks then I decided to get the sack again.

The next place was in the city, squeezing oranges for juice for the soldiers. That was a monotonous job and I hated it. I stayed a week or two, then I got the sack.

Next I went to the radio co-operation factory and had to assemble radios, putting in all the wires, and all the bits and pieces. Now this I liked. I stayed. Later I had one other job and that was at a medical place. We had to get all the medicine orders ready for the chemist shops.

Melbourne was an exciting place. I was happy in the hustle and bustle. We'd go to the pictures, to the beach, go shopping and really get around. The trams were the only way of travelling and it was a fun way of travelling. And there were boys there. I had lots of dates. It was a wonderful time.

Mum got sick at the end of 1943 and I went home to Tasmania to be with her. She wasn't expected to live. She was taken to Launceston General Hospital and I stayed with my cousin, Norah and her husband, Trevor Burness. Their daughter, Jenny, was just a little baby a few weeks old. I loved that little baby and decided that if I had a daughter, I'd call her Jenny. But I never had a daughter, just Barry. Luckily Mum recovered and went home to Stanley. I went back to Melbourne.



*Left: Stepping out
in Melbourne, 1943*

*Norah and baby Jenny (author),
Launceston, 1944*

I met Sid Coombes in Melbourne. He was in the army and was a lovely chap. We went out together a lot and then became engaged. I was very contented and confident as I could see my future with Sid ahead of me. But something unexpected happened to change all that.

One day I walked down the street in the city and found it crowded with American soldiers. They were everywhere. I stopped a girl to ask her what was going on and I can still remember her exact reply. She said, 'Don't you know the marines have landed?' From then on there were always Americans in town. They were so cheeky, so handsome and so charming, but they were fickle. They always had girls around them. They used to drink a lot and always had plenty of money. They were paid more than our boys. They would stop you in the street and ask you to go out with them. Yes, they were cheeky. One put his arm out to me once and said, 'Grab a wing, Chick!' Of course I didn't, I was engaged. 'Over paid, over sexed, and over here' certainly was right.

Ralph Puckett was one of those marines. One night he walked me home from the tram stop and I became very sweet on him. He was from Spartanburg, South Carolina. He was such a gentleman and had that charming Southern accent. We began going out together. I loved the way he would take my arm, be kind to me, take care of me and buy me chocolates. But I was engaged to Sid. What was I going to do? I knew now that I would never marry him.



One day Ralph and I were in the flat where I lived and Jess was visiting. There was a knock on the door and Jess answered it. She came back to me and told me it was Sid. I didn't know what to do. Then I did a terrible thing. I sent Jess to tell him that I wasn't going out with him any more and that I was breaking off our engagement. Of course I should have talked to him myself. I regret that. Wasn't that an awful thing to do to that lovely fellow. I never saw him again and I'm very sorry about it.

So I became engaged to Ralph.

I was always known as Peggy, but I had told Ralph my real name, Nancy Jean. Here's my naughty reason for doing that. Soon after I met Ralph I discovered that he and Sid drank at the same hotel bar, and I was afraid that they would find out that they had the same girlfriend. If I told Ralph my name was Nancy, they would think that Peg and Nancy were two different girls and I would be able to keep both boys for the time being! That's why all my family and friends in Australia call me Peg and everyone I know in America calls me Nancy.

Ralph was stationed in the Pacific Islands, Guadalcanal for a long time, but every chance he had, he came to Melbourne to be with me. It was so romantic. We were married in Melbourne on the 29th March, 1944. Then he went back to America. I had to wait until the end of the war before I could join him. During this time we wrote beautiful love letters to each other.

For me the war was very exciting and the soldiers were heroes. It was all a big adventure. When you are young, you don't realise the pain of war and how mothers and wives suffer so much, and you don't realise what the soldiers go through. The only thing I did realise was that some of the Stanley boys that I grew up with had been killed, and that was tragic.



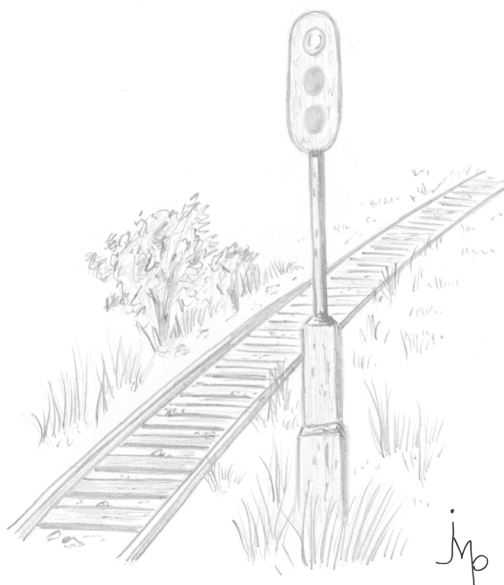




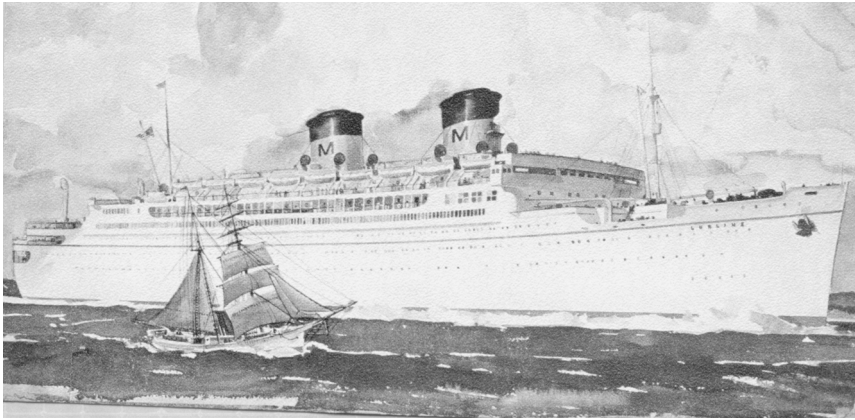
*The Lurline leaves from
Brisbane docks*

Taken from *For the Love of
a Soldier* by Annette Potts
and Lucinda Strauss

10. AMERICA



Leaving Australia was one of the most terrible and saddest times of my life. I had to go by train from Melbourne to Brisbane, ship from Brisbane to San Francisco and train all the way across America to South Carolina. Jess and Colin came to see me off on the train and Mum had come from Stanley. I had been excited while packing and preparing to leave, but when the time came, I didn't want to go. At the station I told Mum I wasn't going, and clung to her. She told me



I travelled to America on the Lurline

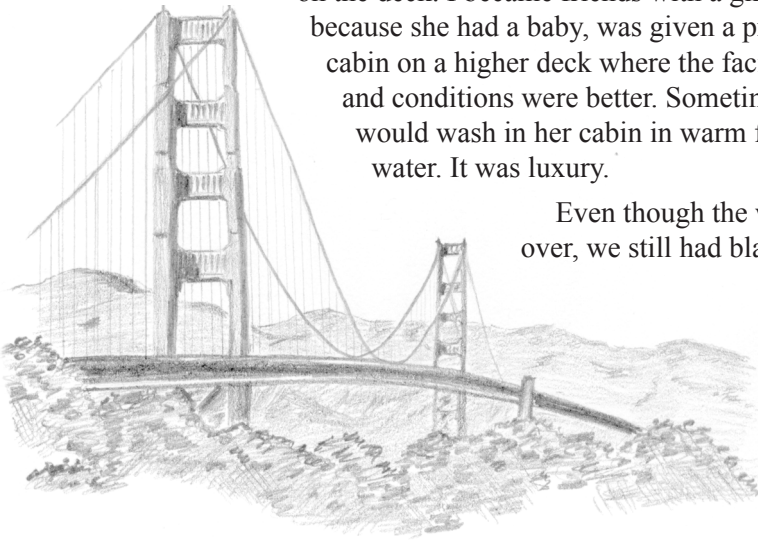
quietly that my place was with my husband. I felt absolutely terrible. I cried. I screamed. When the train began to move I couldn't take my eyes off those three people. I saw dear old Mum standing there on the platform and I knew I would never see her again. I cried all the way to Brisbane.



I was still in a bad way when I boarded the ship with all the other war brides and set sail for America. When we pulled out, the band on the wharf played ‘Now is the hour that we must say goodbye ...’ I cried and cried. I couldn’t bear it. I went down to my cabin and sobbed my heart out.

The *Lurline* was an American passenger ship that had been converted into a troop ship. We slept in hammocks strung across the cabin, had only salt water to wash in, had bed bugs in the bedding, and travelled in a cramped and stuffy atmosphere. The meals were good though. There were also hundreds of soldiers returning from the war and they slept out on the deck. I became friends with a girl who, because she had a baby, was given a private cabin on a higher deck where the facilities and conditions were better. Sometimes I would wash in her cabin in warm fresh water. It was luxury.

Even though the war was over, we still had blackouts



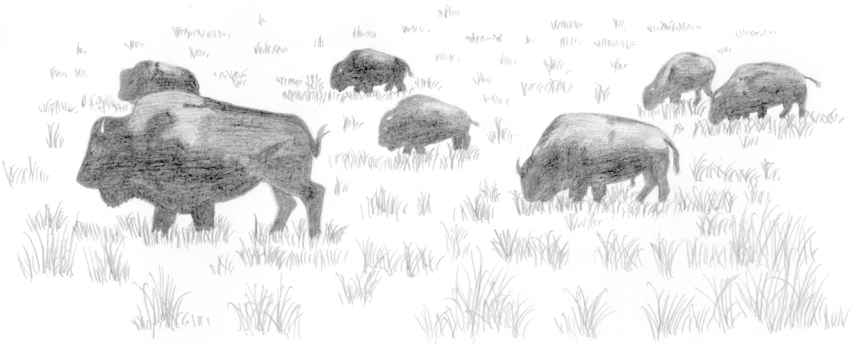
*Golden Gate Bridge,
San Francisco*

every night. It would come over the loud speaker, ‘Hear this, hear this, hear this. Lights out in twenty minutes.’ This was just in case there was an enemy submarine around some where, just in case someone had ‘forgotten’ that the war was over. The sick bay was full of wounded soldiers. I was put into the sick bay at one



stage because I had a fever and I was so miserable with home sickness. I talked a lot with the wounded soldiers as we were separated only by a curtain. I had to eat the soldiers' meals which were not as good as the passengers' meals and they were served on a tin plate. I was very unhappy. If I could have turned the ship around I would have done so.

When we arrived in San Francisco we were put up at a hotel to wait for a train to Chicago. There were many trains travelling to Chicago but they were packed with returning soldiers. It was chaos at the station. There were crowds of people everywhere and trains coming and



I would like to see it all again – the Indians, the buffaloes...

going without any time-tables. Finally they found room for us on the right train and we were moving on again. We stopped at Reno, Nevada, and some soldiers bought me a hamburger. There was no food on the train and I was starving. We stopped at Salt Lake City, Utah, where they organized to have food on the train. I don't remember any other stops. We travelled on and on across the states – Wyoming, Nebraska, Iowa to Chicago, Illinois.



San Francisco

Travelling through all this country was boring for me because there were so many open plains and I was tired of travelling. If I did that trip today I know that I would be extremely interested in all of it. I would like to see it all again, now that I know something of the history of the country – the Indians, the buffaloes and the early settlers from Europe. America has great history, but I didn't know anything about it then and if I had known, I don't think I would have appreciated it. I was too young and interested in frivolous things.

There were three of us going south to our husbands. In Chicago we were all put together in a room in a hotel to wait for our Southern train. We waited three days. We went on a tour of the city, but I don't remem-



With Ralph and our son Barry in 1971





I have lived in the United States for 53 years now



Chicago

ber how we got around. I remember seeing the place where Al Capone was shot. We were given American money and didn't know how to use it. It was so strange to me after pounds, shillings and pence. When we had to pay for something we just held it out and they took what they wanted. I guess we were taken down some.

At last we found ourselves on the Southern train. There were no sleepers so we sat up all night. Sometimes I wonder what happened to those other girls but we didn't keep in touch. Now I can't even remember their names. Even though we were exhausted with all the travelling we were excited at the prospect of seeing our husbands again – our long awaited reunion.

The time arrived at last and we stopped at Spartanburg, South Carolina. Ralph and all his family were there to meet me. It was September, 1945. It was a kind of shock to see Ralph again as he looked different and seemed almost a stranger. I thought, 'I've come all this way for this man. What have I done?' But I was greeted with love and affection. It took me a while to get used to him again, but the old feeling came back and we set up house in Spartanburg. He was a wonderful husband.

After a couple of years we had Barry and we were very happy. I had a major operation a few years later and was not able to have any more children. We lived in several different places, all in either North or South Carolina. Ralph worked as an accountant for most of his life after the war. We were married for thirty-six years. He died in 1980 and here I am still living in Spartanburg. I have lived in the United States for fifty-three years now.

I went back to Tasmania for two visits. First in 1972 and then in 1984/5. The highlight of these visits was seeing my sisters, brothers and



cousins after such a long absence. What fun we had and what laughs! It was great to be home again. I still think of myself as Australian and have never taken out American citizenship.

During my 1972 visit, my sister Enid, gave me the book *Escape to an Island* by Eleanor Alliston which describes life on Three Hummock Island after the Alliston family took over from Mr and Mrs Nichols in 1951. I treasure the book and have spent hours reading and rereading it. But I didn't like what Mrs Alliston said about Mrs Nichols and how the house was gloomy and neglected and that the island was neglected. I didn't think that was true.

I corresponded with Mrs Nichols until she died. I thought she was an exceptional woman. I visited her and Mr Nichols in 1972 at their home in Stanley. At this time they also ran a farm at Forest where their grandson (Jean's adopted son) worked for them. Mrs Nichols and I talked for hours about old times. We were very fond of each other. On this visit she told me that Joyce had married and was living near Hobart and gave me her address. I visited Joyce also to talk and laugh over those memorable times on Three Hummock. When I went back in 1984 Mrs Nichols had passed away.

Now that I am seventy-four years old, I am settled here in my small retirement unit in Spartanburg and will probably not return to Tasmania again. I am happy here. Barry and my grandson Phoenix also live in town so I can see them regularly. I reminisce about Tasmania and especially about the time I spent on Three Hummock quite a lot. I think about the work I did, the horses, the big sand dunes, the beaches, and all the people I knew there. It was a world of its own. I have a deep love for that island. What memories it has given me.



EPILOGUE

Today most of Three Hummock Island is a nature reserve. It is a haven for the native plants, animals and birds that abound. Muttonbirds are now left in peace to breed in their rookeries every year. The days of farming are over and the few remaining sheep from the Alliston era are gradually being removed from the island. Rob Alliston, elder son of Eleanor and John Alliston, lives alone on the island, occupying the original homestead where Peg lived in the thirties and forties. He runs a successful tourist venture for visitors.

The island has changed in many ways since the days of Peg's youth, but there remains the atmosphere of peace and serenity, and the wild beauty of the landscape that captured her heart so many years ago.



Limited 3rd Edition

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The book proper is 76 pages (5-80) and is broken into 3 signatures: 1 x 24, 1 x 28, 1 x 24 to match centre spreads.

When imposing, use a Transparency Blend Space of CMYK, with these page numbers:

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28, 5, 6, 27, 26, 7, 8, 25, 24, 9, 10, 23, 22, 11, 12, 21, 20, 13, 14, 19, 18, 15, 16, 17, 56, 29, 30, 55, 54, 31, 32, 53, 52, 33, 34, 51, 50, 35, 36, 49, 48, 37, 38, 47, 46, 39, 40, 45, 44, 41, 42, 43, 80, 57, 58, 79, 78, 59, 60, 77, 76, 61, 62, 75, 74, 63, 64, 73, 72, 65, 66, 71, 70, 67, 68, 69

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The pages of this book are 160 mm wide by 215 mm high.

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